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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire, sent to the chairperson of either the psychology or the sociology department of all colleges and universities in the United States, explored the extent and nature of attitudes about hiring Ph.D. couples in the same department. A total of 2,027 colleges and universities comprised the sample group; however, only 16 percent (329) returned the questionnaire. Results indicate that administrators who would oppose hiring a husband-wife team in the same department are in the minority, and that antinepotism policies and attitudes are no longer prevalent. The 33 percent of department chairpersons who did respond in the bottom third of the scale are a sizeable minority. It is possible that nearly a third of the time the Ph.D. couple will be greeted with a chairperson who at least actively opposes their candidacy for two positions in her/his department. Advantages and disadvantages to both the department and to the couple are indicated. (MJM)

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Attitudes Toward Hiring a Professional Couple: Results of a Recent Survey

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In June, 1971, the Board of Directors of the Association of American Colleges endorsed a statement concerning so-called "anti-nepotism regulations," saying that "such policies and practices subject faculty members to an automatic decision on a basis wholly unrelated to academic qualifications and limit them unfairly in their opportunity to practice their profession." While this kind of statement may have helped clear the air of such discriminatory policies, whether or not the attitudes toward hiring married couples in academia have been affected is another question. A university or college with an administrator who is personally opposed to the idea of hiring couples probably has an anti-nepotism policy whether or not it exists in written form.

If some administrators do hold these attitudes, then the Ph.D. couple, already limited in their job options, may be faced with discrimination because they are married. For example, assuming a couple wishes to live together, their range of possible jobs is already restricted to pairs of jobs in the same geographic location. This usually means that they are restricted to two universities in the same city or nearby cities, two different departments of the same university, or the same department in one university. One could propose a kind Guttman scale of administrator attitudes about these job opportunities: e.g., those who truly regard the couple's marital status as an irrelevant dimension in hiring would consider a well-qualified couple for all three options, while those who harbor attitudes against the hiring of such a couple might not consider a couple in different departments of the same university, and would be very much opposed to hiring them in the same department. It is a distinct possibility, then, that this last option of being hired into the same department may be effectively closed to the Ph.D. couple by a de-facto anti-nepotism policy.

Assuming that a department chairperson's opinions are important in the hiring process, and that an administrator's opinions may be most clearly distinguished at the end of our "Guttman scale" -- hiring in the same department -- a questionnaire was sent to the chairperson of either the psychology or the sociology department of all colleges and universities in the United States. Goals of the research were to explore the extent and nature of attitudes about hiring Ph.D. couples in the same department, to derive categories of attitudes for possible experimental research efforts, to locate Ph.D. couples in the same field for future case studies, and eventually to develop guidelines for helping married Ph.D.'s in the same field in their job seeking and holding strategies.

METHOD

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was printed on both sides of a single page of Stanford University letterhead, and was mailed in early December, 1973. Addressed to the department chairperson, it explained that a guide was being prepared for professional couples, and asked that the chairperson imagine that she/he had two assistant professor openings for which a husband-wife team had applied. The couple was described as having good recommendations and qualifications and one publication each. Respondants were asked to list their comments in an open-ended format under four headings: Advantages to the Department, Disadvantages to the Department, Professional Advantages to the Couple, and Professional Disadvantages to the Couple. An attitude scale ranging from "actively oppose" to "actively support" was also included for responses to the question, "Overall, how likely is it you would support the hiring of a professional couple?"

In addition to comments listed under the four headings and responses to the attitude scale, the questionnaires were precoded by type of university (whether or not "major"), and by sex of the Project Director who signed the cover letter. In this way, differential return rates and other internal analyses could be conducted. Also, when the questionnaires were returned, one more variable was included for analyses -- whether or not the department had had some kind of experience with such couples.

Universities precoded as "major" were selected and agreed upon by four social scientists, and they comprised only 34 universities out of our total list of 2027. Experience with such couples was coded whenever a respondant indicated that her/his department had such a couple presently, had previously had one, knew of one in another department, or was married to a professional.

The Sample

Given the open-ended nature of the questionnaire, we did not expect a high return rate, so to ensure a reasonable number of responses in absolute terms, questionnaires were sent to all colleges and universities rather than to a sample. It was somewhat arbitrarily decided to send the questionnaires to departments representing the "social sciences"-- psychology and sociology departments -- since these disciplines appear to be especially active in investigating social problems.

RESULTS

Response Rate

Overall, our pessimistic expectations about return rate were confirmed: we received responses from only 16% of those to whom we sent questionnaires. However, using postmark on the return envelope as an indication of geographic location, questionnaires were returned from 46 states as well as Puerto Rico and the Phillipines. Thus, we do seem to have a fairly good geographical

representation of universities. Also, 16% of such a large population does yield a good number of responses: we received questionnaires from 329 respondants.

There was a large difference in response rate between "major" universities and the overall sample. The "majors" returned 21 questionnaires, a response rate of 62%. We do not ascribe any great significance to the difference, however, because we sent the"majors" a second mailing of the questionnaire in an effort to obtain a useful number in this group. Also, 62% of 34 is not nearly as stable or meaningful a figure as is 16% of 2027 -- we would be more inclined to predict future response rates to similar questionnaires based on the larger sample than on the smaller.

Sex of Project Director did not affect response rate for either the overall sample or for "major universities:" nearly equal numbers of questionnaires were returned for both Project Directors.

Response Categories

Categories were developed separately for each of the four open-ended questions on the basis of the respondants' comments. Each separate idea was coded, and the questionnaires were check-coded three times to ensure uniform use of the categories. A sample of the questionnaires (25) was coded by another social scientist using the same categories of responses, and both for ideas and for categories selected for coding, agreement with the original coder was 85%.

Since a major goal of this exploratory research was to discover the nature of attitudes about hiring married Ph.D.'s, the categories under each heading will be described. For each category, the number of times it was chosen (and the proportion of the total number of respondants this number represents) are provided.

Advantages to the Department

1. Greater personal life-job unity; greater commitment to departmental and professional goals; stimulation of each other and colleagues; and higher department morale. 77: 23%
2. Greater coordination of faculty professional and research activities. 47: 14%
3. Good models for graduate students; more open to students; and adds extra dimensions to a department. 30: 9%
4. Increased potential for team teaching; ease of substitution for each other. 30: 9%
5. Personnel stability -- less likely to take jobs elsewhere. 41: 12%
6. Reduction of administrative-economic hassles: savings on fringe benefits, recruitment time and expenses, etc. 22: 7%
7. Both may be hired for less salary than two unmarried individuals. 20: 6%
8. Satisfies affirmative action requirements and settles nepotism issue. 24: 7%
9. Easier communication within the department. 17: 5%
10. Department gains hiring advantage for getting a star, or for getting two who would not come otherwise. 23: 7%
11. None (only if explicitly stated). 64: 19%
12. Miscellaneous. 37: 11%

A brief look at the categories shows that the most commonly mentioned advantages to the department were personal life-job unity, coordination of professional and research activities, stability of personnel, and no advantages.

Also, certain of the categories fall into clusters of ideas. The first three categories could be combined and labeled "positive effects from the couple's relationship," and categories four to ten could be called "administrative and economic convenience to the department." When the categories are combined this way, 119 (36%) of the respondants made some mention of the first cluster, and 131 (40%) mentioned the second. Results of analyses with these grouped clusters and those for the other major headings will be discussed in a later section.

Disadvantages to the Department

1. Ideological similarity; reduced scope of faculty orientations; increased probability of parochialism and shared viewpoints. 30: 9%
2. Faculty evaluation more difficult for the department (promotion, salary, and tenure); hard to treat the two differently. Also, general tenure problems. 101: 31%
3. The department may feel forced to keep a weak member to also keep a good one. 14: 4%
4. Arrangement of sabbaticals, departmental scheduling, and department resources a greater problem: the couple will want special consideration. 39: 12%
5. The couple's marital and emotional problems with each other will be brought to and from work, spilling over into departmental affairs. 74: 22%
6. Both may be unhappy and dissatisfied if one is; both may leave if one is unhappy; both will leave permanently or temporarily at the same time: the couple's relationship will thus cause either too great a gap or low morale in the department. 58: 18%

7. Emotional problems between the couple if one of them is treated differently. 21: 6%
8. The couple will form an unmanageable alliance or emotional clique: they will be overprotective of one another, and each will feel alienated from those the other dislikes. 32: 10%
9. Departmental politics will be influenced; the couple will exercise undue power; they will form a voting block. 74: 22%
10. The couple will be a source of internal or external discontent and confusion (for reasons other than categories eight or nine), and cause low morale among others in the department. 54: 16%
11. Other faculty members or administrators outside the department will suspect nepotism. 40: 12%
12. None (coded only if explicitly stated). 20: 6%
13. Miscellaneous. 54: 16%

Categories mentioned by many respondants as disadvantages to the department were difficulties in faculty evaluation, the couple's marital and emotional problems, influence of department politics, dissatisfaction and/or departure of both, and the couple as a source of discontent. These categories also form clusters of ideas: the first four could be labeled "administrative problems for the department," the next three "problems between the couple," and the next four as "the couple as a clique and potential source of discontent." When combined, the couple as a clique and potential source of discontent was mentioned by 148 respondants (45%), administrative problems by 138 (42%), and problems between the couple by 131 (40%). Note that these percentages exceed 100% -- respondants were free to offer as many ideas as they wished, and their ideas often fell into more than one of these broad categories.

Advantages to the Couple

1. Greater personal life-job unity; greater commitment to departmental and professional goals; mutual stimulation; and higher morale. 89: 27%
2. Coordination of professional and research activities. 91: 27%
3. Ease of team teaching and substitution. 28: 8%
4. Savings on professional resources, time, and expenses; e.g. commuting and professional libraries are shared. 54: 16%
5. Being together at work; being able to spend time together. 24: 7%
6. Neither is underemployed or underpaid; both can find employment in the area in which they are trained. 30: 9%
7. Personal life styles more convenient; flexible child care patterns; sharing time off. 20: 6%
8. None (coded only if explicitly stated). 33: 10%
9. Miscellaneous. 32: 10%

For advantages to the couple, coordination of professional and research activities was most often mentioned, followed by greater life-job unity, savings of time and resources, and no advantage. Clusters of ideas for this heading are "professional development" (composed of the first two categories) and "economics and conveniences to the couple" (a combination of the remaining substantive categories). Of the respondants, 149 (45%) mentioned an idea grouped under the first, while 119 (36%) made comments under the second.

Disadvantages to the Couple

1. Reduced scope of ideological orientation; less chance of contact with new ideas from others or other departments. 25: 8%
2. Department evaluation of couple may be discriminatory to one: e.g., one may be evaluated in terms of spouse's performance; difficult for both to get tenure. 20: 6%

3. The department's evaluations may have effects on the couple's decisions: e.g., one of the couple may slow down in professional growth to stay even with the other; reduced mobility of the couple. 57: 17%
4. The couple may be paid less than two unmarried individuals, or expected to do more work. 19: 6%
5. Difficulties in departmental activities for the couple: e.g., evaluation of spouse; coordination of sabbaticals and department funds. 18: 5%
6. Other's attitudes towards the couple; loss of separate identity; others evaluate each one in comparison to the other. 45: 14%
7. Emotional and social problems with others (resentment, pettiness, suspicion of nepotism). 35: 10%
8. General marital problems dealing with lack of role differentiation; neglect of home duties; too much time together. 29: 9%
9. Competition and jealousy between couple. 49: 15%
10. Disagreements about departmental issues; job tensions and problems brought home and create problems in the marriage. 20: 6%
11. None (coded only if explicitly stated). 22: 7%
12. Miscellaneous. 42: 13%

The categories most often mentioned were those dealing with the couple's decisions in response to department evaluations, competition and jealousy between the couple, others' attitudes toward the couple, and emotional and social problems with others. Grouped categories for disadvantages to the couple were "professional problems for the couple" (the first five categories), "problems for the couple with others" (the next two), and "marital problems for the couple" (categories 8,9, and 10). The number of respondants with comments coded under the first grouped category was 119 (36%), for the second, 72 (22%), and 86 (26%) for the third.

Along with the substantive categories, null responses under the four headings also provide some interesting differences in the data. The number of respondants who did not comment varies systematically across the four headings, with Disadvantages to the Department having the smallest number of non-respondants, and Professional Advantages and Disadvantages to the couple having more than would be expected ($\underline{X}^2 = 18.08$, $\underline{df} = 3$, $\underline{p} < .01$). In addition, respondants explicitly stating "none" were more frequent for Advantages to the Department, and less frequent for Disadvantages to the Department and the Couple ($\underline{X}^2 = 35.65$, $\underline{df} = 3$, $\underline{p} < .01$).

Another kind of null response was also noted where the chairperson volunteered either that an operative anti-nepotism policy existed for her/his university, or that the marital status of the individuals was irrelevant to the hiring process. Anti-nepotism was coded when it was stated that the couple would not be hired because of an administrative policy, when a dean or other administrator outside the department would be opposed, or when a departmental policy existed that would not allow one of the couple to be department chairperson. Only 7% of our respondants were coded as having an anti-nepotism policy that would influence hiring, and there were no differences between "major" universities and the overall sample in the prevalence of this kind of response. Similarly, there were no university-type differences in whether or not the couple's marital status was seen as irrelevant in the hiring process, and 11% of our sample responded with this comment.

Attitude Scale

Responses to the question, "Overall, how likely is it you would support the hiring of a professional couple?", ranged on a five-point scale from "actively oppose" to "actively support." The use of "actively oppose" at

one extreme of the scale was considered carefully and somewhat fearfully: while we wanted to get a meaningful response, it seemed possible that this alternative was strongly worded enough to be avoided as a socially undesirable response. This was an important reason for making sure that respondants understood that the questionnaire was completely anonymous. The results suggest any social stigma attached to this response was not a major problem. The distribution of responses to this question is basically rectangular, with a slightly higher number at the middle position, expressing neither support nor opposition (see Figure 1). Since the distribution was rectangular, and three different types of responses are implied by the scale (oppose, neither oppose nor support, and support), the scale was trichotomized for further analyses.

There were no significant relationships between the attitude scale and sex of Project Director or type of university. Additionally, while there was a slight tendency for the "major" universities to have had more experience with Ph.D. couples, the effect of experience on responses to the attitude scale was not significant.

Looking at responses to the attitude scale by the grouped categories for each heading of the open-ended questions, there does appear to be a relationship for Advantages and Disadvantages to the Couple and for Advantages to the Department, but not for Disadvantages to the Department (see Tables 1-4). For advantages to the Couple, those who were opposed were more likely to respond with "none," while those who would support the hiring of such couples were less likely to say "none" (see Table 1 -- note that the second finding is not simply a paraphrase of the first, because the attitude scale has been trichotorized, not dichotomized).

Under Disadvantages to the Couple, those opposed saw fewer problems with others for the couple than did those who were in favor, and perhaps also fewer marital and more professional problems for the couple (although this may be over-interpreting Table 2 a little). Respondants were more likely to say "none" and less likely to mention positive effects from the couple's interpersonal relationship under Advantages to the Department if they were opposed to hiring such a couple, and the converse was true for those who supported the idea (Table 3). No other analyses with the categories or attitude scale approached significance, with the exceptions of Disadvantages to the Department looked at by the experience of the respondant with professional couples. Table 5 suggests that those with experience are more likely to mention the couple as a clique and source of discontent and less likely to list problems between the couple or in administration. Those without experience are less likely to mention the couple as a clique than would be expected.

DISCUSSION

Depending on one's expectations concerning administrative attitudes, the results of this research are either encouraging or discouraging. While it is clear that administrators who would oppose hiring a husband-wife team in the same department are in the minority, and that antinepotism policies and attitudes are no longer prevalent, the 33% of department chairpersons who did respond in the bottom third of the scale are a sizeable minority. It is possible that nearly a third of the time the Ph.D. couple will be greeted with a chairperson who at least somewhat actively opposes their candidacy for two positions in her/his department.

Whether or not the chairperson who says she/he is opposed on our questionnaire acts on this opposition is a crucial question. There may be as

little correspondence between these reported attitudes and the actual behavior of the department chairperson as LaPiere (1934) found in his Chinese couples study. (This study showed a large number of hotel and restaurant owners would say that they would not admit a Chinese couple, but when faced with an actual situation, they almost invariably did admit them.) However, it is important to know that a fairly large minority of those with some control in the hiring process do have attitudes in opposition to Ph.D. couples whether or not they would act on these prejudices.

On the other hand, nearly a third of the time the Ph.D. couple will be met with a chairperson who at least somewhat actively supports their candidacy. This chairperson is much the more agreeable for the couple, but an ideal conception of department hiring processes would suggest that both this chairperson and the one who opposes the Ph.D. couple are not being entirely professional. The appropriate response on the attitude scale is the middle position, and the appropriate comment is "the marital status of these two individuals is not relevant, each candidate is considered on her/his own merits." Given that only 21% chose this middle position, and that only 11% made the "irrelevant" comment, it is clear that this kind of ideal disinterest in attributes of candidates that are unrelated to academic qualifications is relatively rare. In view of this situation, it is fortunate for the Ph.D. couple that more than half the time, they will either be supported or considered separately on their own merits (if we can interpret the middle position on the attitude scale this way).

It is interesting that comparisons with the attitude scale and the various grouped categories showed so few significant relationships. The attitude scale was not related to any of the grouped categories under

disadvantages to the department, and was most clearly related to "None" under advantages to the department. This suggests that attitudes about hiring Ph.D. couples are not particularly related to certain kinds of arguments having to do with effects that the couple will have on a department. It may be, however, that there is a relationship between attitude and the number of positive or negative effects seen for the department, but this analysis has not yet been completed.

Similarly, grouped categories for advantages and disadvantages to the couple do not show many informative relationships with the attitude scale. For advantages, the major difference appears to be with the number of respondants saying "None" (as with advantages to the department). With disadvantages, however, those in opposition tend to see slightly more professional and marital problems for the couple and fewer problems for them with others. While responses under advantages and disadvantages to the couple are most clearly outside the realm of a department chairperson's consideration in hiring, if she/he does feel that hiring the couple may detrimentally affect their marriage and/or professional growth and this is a reason used for opposing their hiring, then it becomes a relevant issue to the couple. (It is surprising how often conceptually similar categories appear as both disadvantages and advantages, e.g., a grouped category under advantages to the couple is "greater professional development," a category that contains both the idea of professional growth and of personal growth.)

It is apparent that there are no great differences between our "major" universities and the overall sample in category responses, attitude responses, nepotism rule responses, or "the couple's marital status is irrelevant" responses. "Major" universities are slightly more likely to have had experience with such

couples, probably because they are likely to be larger departments with more frequent openings. One could conclude, then, that given two job openings in the same department, "major" universities are not less likely (nor are they more likely) to have negative attitudes toward hiring a Ph.D. couple than are other universities.

Couples and other interested persons will want to derive their own conclusions from these results, but perhaps some of the potential problems and advantages can be made clearer. First, a major theme across responses is that the two separate individuals who comprise the Ph.D. couple are not perceived separately, but rather as a "package". Second, the couple is seen as having a positive or negative effect on others in the department and on department morale. A third theme has to do with the administrative difficulties that the couple can create or diminish: the couple may expect or receive special treatment, adding an extra dimension of difficulty to each decision, or they will facilitate many arrangements. Finally, the couple's own interpersonal relationship is also an important consideration. There is concern about whether the couple's marriage will be strengthened or weakened by being together at work, and about the effects of the marriage relationship itself on the department.

It will be apparent from the summation above that many of the disadvantages and advantages perceived by department chairpersons are mirror images of each other: the same attributes or characteristics are expected to produce negative consequences by some and positive consequences by others. Thus, a fruitful strategy for couples may be to point out the positive aspects of a dimension of which the chairperson is already aware. We would hypothesize that this would be easier than creating an awareness of a whole new dimension.

While this and other hypotheses deserve experimental testing, it is hoped that the delineation of the attitudinal problems and potentials outlined here will be of help to professional couples faced with the problems of job-hunting.

"Overall, how likely is it you would support the hiring of a professional couple?"

Actively Oppose 47/15% 59/18% 71/21% 53/16% 54/16% Actively Support

47/15% did not respond to this question.

Figure 1.

TABLE 1

Attitude Scale by Advantages to the Couple

	Professional Development	Economics and Convenience	None	
Oppose	52	46	17	115
Neither Support Nor Oppose	45	35	9	89
Support	75	66	4	145
	172	147	30	349

$X^2 = 12.47$, 4 df, $p < .05$

TABLE 2

Attitude Scale by Disadvantages to the Couple

	Professional Problems	Problems with Others	Marital Problems	None	
Oppose	53	20	39	4	116
Neither Support Nor Oppose	29	21	21	7	78
Support	52	54	34	8	148
	134	95	94	19	342

$X^2 = 15.92$, 6 df, $p < .05$

TABLE 3

Attitude Scale by Advantages to the Department

	Effects from Couple's Interpersonal Relationship	Administrative and Economic Convenience	None	
Oppose	31	42	33	106
Neither Support Nor Oppose	29	37	19	85
Support	88	83	7	178
	148	162	59	369

$X^2 = 42.02$, 4 df, $p < .01$

TABLE 4

Attitude Scale by Disadvantages to the Department

	Couple as Clique	Problems Between Couple	Administrative Problems	None	
Oppose	77	57	70	1	205
Neither Support Nor Oppose	45	37	41	7	130
Support	65	50	61	9	185
	187	144	172	17	520

$X^2 = 7.13$, 6 df, n.s.

TABLE 5

Experience by Disadvantages to the Department

	Couple as Clique	Problems Between Couple	Administrative Problems	None	
No Experience	151	120	150	14	435
Experience	82	33	46	6	167
	233	153	196	20	602

$X^2 = 11.19$, 3 df, $p < .05$

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